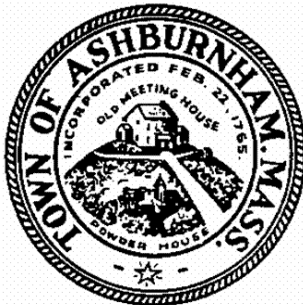


Board of Selectmen  
Extension 109  
Town Administrator  
Extension 109  
Town Accountant  
Extension 120  
Town Clerk  
Extension 114  
Tax Collector  
Extension 113  
Treasurer  
Extension 112 or 110  
Board of Assessors  
Extension 111  
Land Use Office  
Extension 117  
Planning Board  
Extension 121  
Conservation Commission  
Extension 115



## **TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM**

*Town Hall, 32 Main Street  
Ashburnham, Massachusetts 01430*

*OFFICE OF THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR*

Animal Control  
Board of Health  
Building Commission  
Conservation Commission  
Council on Aging  
Cultural Council  
Electrical Inspector  
Gas & Plumbing Inspector  
Historical Commission  
Municipal Planning  
Parks & Recreation  
Planning Board  
Zoning Board of Appeals

**PHONE:** (978)-827-4100

**FAX:** (978) 827-4105

## **TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT November 4, 2013**

Town Administrator's reports are available on-line at <http://www.ashburnham-ma.gov>

### **TOWN COMMITTEES**

Currently there are openings on the following (1) Conservation Commission, (3) Council on Aging Board, (1) Board of Assessors, (1) Capital Planning, (1) Advisory Board and (4) Cable Advisory Board. These are listed on the Town's website under Volunteer Opportunities.

### **DPW**

With the funding for the water line replacement in place I have met with Tighe & Bond to begin formalizing the USDA application process.

I would like to begin the discussion with the Board about looking to put together an article for the Annual Town Meeting for the design and construction of a DPW facility on Williams Road. In order to qualify for USDA Grant funding our town's median income must not exceed the States non-metropolitan medium income. Based on 1999 statistics we are at 80%. USDA has been a great source of revenue and would not want to lose out on this opportunity.

### **FIRE**

I would request the Board to authorize me to sign the "Agreement of Consent Election" under section 4 of Chapter 150E of the General Laws, as amended between the International Association of Firefighters and the Town of Ashburnham. This will waive the hearing and to have the Department of Labor Relations conduct an election in accordance with General Laws Chapter 150E section 4, by secret ballot, to determine whether or not a majority of the employees in the bargaining unit described as follows:

"All full-time and regular part-time Firefighters, Engineers, Lieutenants and Captains: excluding all confidential, managerial, casual and other employees."

Have posted and advertised for full-time Firefighter Paramedic to replace our retired Battalion Chief Bob Salo. The position of Battalion Chief will not be filled.

Deputy Chief Jerry Descoteaux has submitted his retirement papers effective September of 2014.

## **SPECIAL TOWN MEETING**

The meeting went well, completed in just under two hours and all articles were voted in the affirmative except for Article 4 to turn control of the VMS to the Board of Selectmen for the purpose of demolish. Much was said and insinuated about how the “town” handled the finding of a home for the COA and the effort that was shown.

At the ATM on May 6, 1995 there was an article to establish, repair the VMS as the home for the Council on Aging which was attached to an override question for funding. This vote passed but the subsequent override failed. Since that time the COA has been in the VMS, a facility that has continued to fall into disrepair. In the fall of 2009, my first year as Town Administrator, my attention was drawn to the plight of the COA in both deficient management and adequate facilities. After addressing the management structure of the COA, I looked at the feasibility study that had already been done and used it as the starting point. In February of 2010, after considerable time and effort, an application formulated by MRPC for a CDBG project was submitted for \$430,153 to include the architectural designs for the renovation of the VMS for the COA. In August of 2010, we were informed that our application was denied. To receive more “bonus” points as a regional submittal we developed a joint application with Ashby. Just prior to submittal we were informed that “Senior Center Projects” were not being funded and therefore removed. While this was in process I, as Chief Financial Officer was looking for ways to maximize our tax dollars. The VMS was a money pit. We were using over 4,000 gallons of heating fuel for the limited time it was used and I determined with input from Interim COA Director Maggie Whitney that the seniors would be moved temporarily to the town hall. This relocation was necessary and certainly required if we were going to remodel the VMS.

Alternatives for the COA – Senior Center have been varied and include:

- Land was set aside by the Town years ago on South School Street yet never successfully voted upon for a new site.
- Oakmont Regional (Supt. Mike Zapantis) offered to let the COA move into the area where the Town had temporarily occupied but the seniors declined.
- Briggs Elementary School during the design phase looked to incorporate a section for seniors. This could have possibly opened up additional funding for the overall project, but was ultimately not supported by the seniors.
- Incorporate a senior center with the Bresnahan Scouting Center. Although the invitation was originally made when the new scouting center was going to be on Water Street and not the ultimate Center Street location the seniors did not support.
- Co Build a center with Westminster. Westminster COA had no problem with Ashburnham residents attending their facility, but did not want to do a joint venture.
- Co Build a center with Ashby. The CDBG project was not supported by the state for they decided not to fund senior center projects.
- As an alternative to building a senior center, Ms Whitney and others visited other sites to include Templeton, Hubbardston, Westminster, Gardner, Winchendon, Swampscott, and although they learned a great deal from the visits no plans were ever discussed in depth.

Although the destiny/viability of the VMS has been tied to the plans of some seniors to resurrect a senior center, the likelihood of this happening is minimal at best and plans/alternatives should continually be explored to eventually find a permanent suitable location for our senior center.

I will be receiving quotes for the camera security system to move forward with the project.

## **TAX CLASSIFICATION**

We will hold the tax classification hearing on November 18<sup>th</sup>. Based on a single tax rate allocation the tax rate for FY 14 will be around \$19.82 per thousand of evaluation. This is an increase of 5% from FY 13. The increase is due to a 3% deflation of property values and the temporary borrowing costs for debt service for Briggs Elementary. Deflation occurs when distressed and foreclosed properties are sold at a value less than the assessed value, the decrease in value than reflects on the Town’s real-estate total.

## **HEALTH INSURANCE**

Letters went out to the eligible retirees to inform them of their health care options. Sign-up will continue through January with benefits starting in February 2014.

Due to the increase of health cost projected at 8 to 9% we have asked Edd Byrnes to look at alternatives such as "look alike" programs to GIC. I will follow up as more information becomes available.

## **DPIR**

I attended a grantee training seminar for Distressed Properties Identification and Revitalization program. This is in connection with the \$125,000 grant that we received. The major focus of this program is to identify properties that have been foreclosed on by banks and get them to identify their intent. There are two major stones in the way, one being that the Bank or institution has to be the recorded owner of the property and the second is that the monies in the grant are used to pay either the government employees or MRPC employees to help us., There is no funding assistance to the distressed owners or the communities that are losing needed property taxes due to deflation of property.

## **COA**

Claude Daigle after a short hiatus has returned as the new driver for the Council on Aging for long medical and recreation trips. Claude brings his many years of experience and dedication to our staff.

## **TOWN HALL FLOOD**

I was informed by Tom Campbell lawyer for our insurance company that we are settling the litigation against Worcester County Refrigeration (and M. O'Connor Contracting). This was a subrogation case; that is, the insurer was suing in the Town's name to recover its losses from the water damage on the policy. The lawyers will be putting together a release, and I am asking you to authorize me to sign the release on behalf of the Board.

## **SOLAR**

Project on Murray Road is moving at a rapid pace. Richard Reynolds our Building Commissioner reported that they are in the assemblage phase and are on schedule to be up and running by the end of December.